31: Hofmann--611 [2] N-3 (1909) 1912 Formosans
116, 769

In a Chinese village in the vicinity of Taikokan I had an opportunity to observe a peculiar mortuary custom of the Chinese. A young woman in mourning visited a cemetery together with a worker. The ceremonies began with prayers and with the burning of yellow paper, symbolizing money, which the deceased needs in the after-life, and similar ceremonies. The worker then opened the grave. The large wooden coffin was placed on the earth instead of in it; it was covered with earth so that a mound was formed above the grave. When I asked what the purpose of this was I was told that it was customary to exhume the remains of the body several years after the funeral. The young Hakka girl, a working girl dressed in shabby clothes, answered my questions willingly. She told me that she had been saving up money for a long time to have the body of her mother exhumed and buried anew. I asked her whether she was sure that this was the right grave and that she might not have dug up another body by mistake; she answered that her mother was pregnant when she died and that signs of this might be seen in the grave. She was right: the gravedigger lifted up the top of the casket with little trouble and began to take out and clean the bones. They were then placed in a large urn to be presented there. When this container has been set up in the house, the ceremonies have been concluded. Ordinarily the bodies are exhumed after three years; by that time, since the body is hastily buried and little is done to preserve it, it is already a skeleton. If it should happen that some flesh and tissues still remain, the Chinese take this as a sign that the deceased was a bad man and cannot find peace in the after-life.

removed.[12]

After death, the souls of one's ancestors are believed to live in Yin-chien, where there prevails the same set of moral and economic values that govern the living. The descendants are considered unfilial if they fail to worship their ancestors or do not consecrate periodic sacrifices to make the dead happy in Yin-chien.[13] The dead are considered a part of the family, determining the fortunes and misfortunes of their descendants in strict accordance with the amount of filial piety shown them. Some families build temples for the worship of their ancestors. Of the dead who have no offspring to worship them, most become lost souls wandering the universe as malevolent spirits and have such a strong influence on the living as to be assumed the cause of their misfortunes.

III. RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Awe of the universe intermixed with Taoist sorcery results in one thousand and one strange practices among the less-educated people. Religious practitioners, mostly of the Taoist order, serve in the invocation of gods and spirits, communication with spirits,

12. Masuda, op. cit., pp. 54-60.
13. Ibid., p. 63.